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SPIRATIONS ARMAGEDDON

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Inspirations of Armageddon



INSPIRATIONS OF ARMAGEDDON BY ROLAND BERRILL

*As it was better, youth should strive,
through acts uncouth, toward making,
than repose on aught found made.*

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE SAINT CATHERINE PRESS
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*L*IFE, it has been said, can never be
sanelly appreciated for its true colour
or its facets seen in their correct lights
until the veil has been lifted from the
whole gamut of human emotions.

*Let this little book be in the nature of
a reply; and I dedicate it to any other
who may, from time to time, have been
bewildered or shaken by the loud-voiced
statement of this tempting fallacy.*

R. B.

PREFACE

BEING asked to write a foreword to this little book I may say that what strikes me as being most remarkable about it, knowing the author well as I do, is that the poems are not the work of a poet.

Although not a regular officer, Roland Berrill has served since leaving school both in the Flying Corps and Artillery. He is therefore essentially a soldier and nothing else ; humorous and unassuming, full of the ordinary inconsequential *jote de vivre* of the subaltern.

Judge, for instance, of my astonishment when he informed me that he started writing no longer ago than May of this year, and then only to test the advice of a phrenologist.

Here, therefore, we have the voice of the Younger Generation to whom Armageddon has taught so much ; and I am sure his host of contemporaries will all acclaim this voice from among themselves, prodigious for all its immaturity, which epitomises the appreciation of life that hardship and horror have impressed upon us, and expresses the wide and simple philosophy which still confines the universal revolution of religious thought that is steadily sweeping over us.

Let us hope that those of us who do survive the war may try, like him, to make something more of life than that to which our anæmic and creed-bound Fathers had reduced it.

C. PEREGRINE HENZELL,
Lieut. R.F.A.

Larkhill,
October, 1918.

CONTENTS

Trenches

Zero Hour

Le Permissionnaire Revient

In Memoriam

Body

“ Adonis ”

In Stonehenge

Spring

Willow Pattern

Evening Stroll

Lokodi

In the Night Watches

Old Soul

On the Beach

Rose and Gold

The Studio

TRENCHES

OUR world is cold and mist and wet,
Rusted wire on twisted sticks
And the sodden sombre silhouette
Of an unknown soldier's crucifix ;
Loud coarsest caw of carrion crow,
A wearied buzzer's hymn of blood,
A song of corpses in a row
And months of mystery and mud.

Here where the rodents wheeze and snore
And the rain drips on from the filthy bags,
It's hard to grasp that this is War,
A thing of fire and fife and flags ;
For there's no other shade than slate
In all our hearts this winter's morn,
Unshaven souls awake to hate
The aching misery of dawn.

Yet every post brings envy's page
From daring Youth ; the solemn pride
Of those that bore us ; and from Age
The prayer that God may guard and guide ;
And silk has smudged this scented sheet
Kissed ere young Love must turn again
To Night, high-vitalised and sweet—
They are ours, and we are men.

ZERO HOUR

IT'S grey, grey dawn upon a foreign field,
A faint light shining in a silver mist ;
Ever to foolish nervousness I yield
And scan the little watch upon my wrist ;
Start to the second, or a world is missed !

The stuff is ready when the whistle blows,
My feverish men remove the last few covers ;
The fuzes set, the shells laid out in rows,
Each looking more bloodthirsty than its brothers,
Shrapnel for some and lyddite for the others.

Sudden a melody of ancient song
Deep-hummed and fervent on the air is set,
Echoed by all our tense and waiting throng ;
My heart is choked ! My soldier's eyes are wet :
" Who made thee mighty, make thee mightier
yet."

Wine is the waking wonder of the guns !
With this loud help all, all must England dare !
Shattering, shaking, thunder of the guns !
The volley shrieks along the thickened air !

Berboom ! Berboom !

Berboom ! Berboom ! Berboom !

Berboom !

Blood and mutilation !

Death and doom !

LE PERMISSIONNAIRE REVIENT

HERE with the lonely darkness of the skies,
While far away a battle's anger dies,
I try to feel you near me in the gloom,
To see the gold glint in your bright brown eyes.

Ah, love ! so short a yesterday, and now
These tethered horses lunging in the slough ;
And still those young lips hot upon my cheek,
The softness of your hair about my brow.

On that last morning crept I down the stair,
Opened your door and saw you sleeping there—
Beautiful sweetheart ! did you feel a kiss
Just where your forehead warms to meet your hair?

Before I left I stole this little shoe,
Worn thin where we have danced the hours
through,
And now I press it to my lips as if
Its sweet shaped emptiness were part of you.

IN MEMORIAM

UP in that wheeling bird that knows no pause,
Sit two young men wrapt in its throbbing
 roar ;

There's one that watches for a diving foe,
And one intent upon the work below.

Behind his hooded head the gleaming gun,
With which he hopes to down some rusty Hun ;
And meanwhile many eager ears attend
The word to fire which his fingers send.

Locked to some dull desk all the livelong day,
He toiled before *la guerre*, for meagre pay ;
But now—there goes the gun-bump !—as *his* shell,
With moaning howl rolls on to merry Hell.

Sir Knight ! sail splendid through the shrieking
 strafe,
Love these fine hours of the Fates that laugh
To see at last your life-blood stain the wood
Of that frail barque. Oh, Lord ! but life was good.

BODY

HOW we all love the one with fuzzy hair
Of coral shoulders glistening silver white
Whose mantle drops, revealing, fresh delight,
Her ivory back, alluring, twitching, bare !
My schoolboy's dream was shattered on the *plage*,
The female form divine is nought to me
Yet ever warmer stirs my blood to see
Through wine-dimmed eyes this cunning
camouflage.

Watch where the music whips their little feet,
Their pulsing flesh writhes warm beneath the
lash !—

An alcoholic ode to Oscar Asche
My silly quill scrawls on the quaking sheet ;
Silly, for though the stench of earth is sweet
My soul regards the credit not the cash.

“ ADONIS ”

JUST God, who set in Eden's glade
A single tree they must not plunder,
Yet groves and groves of others made
Whose shade they loved to linger under,
How can we, with our eyes for charm
And our pathways strewn with forbidden flowers,
Pluck with a strong unerring arm
The one you destined to be ours ?

Grown men before our mating time,
In love with Love, yet more with Beauty,
Keep our blood cold as this Northern clime,
Our eyes on the whirring stones of duty.
Then, if our minds and hearts are chaste
When these few lonely years are ended,
May we deserve of Heaven's cup to taste
Love at first sight, life-long and splendid.

IN STONEHENGE

WHO raised these pillars on the rolling plain,
Fierce towering temple of an ancient creed?
What master mind had ye or might or main,
And where did all this patient reverence lead ?

See how to save your effort from decay,
Fool props and buttresses of wood we try ;
While as I dream here on this summer's day,
Man's furious falcons flash across the sky.

What did ye know that we have yet to find,
And what have we found that ye never knew ?
Great generation of an older kind,
Strong men and sane who loved and strove and
slew.

Was not your hope perhaps more rugged real,
Your concept of a God more clear and wide ?
Then why should I not in your temple kneel ?
Some subtle power helps me to decide.

SPRING

L YING in the April sunshine,
Mother's puggy-wuggy boy !
How your gurgling baby laughter
Harks me back to other joy—
Summer nights of sapphire splendour
True love's kiss restrained and tender,
Heaven's gift to Love's surrender—
Mother's baby boy !

WILLOW PATTERN

HERE in the mullioned window's light,
Where Mother sits at close of day,
And everything is neat and bright,
Arranged in the quiet older way,

Upon the table's cloth of gold,
On a little plinth as black as coal,
Stands cracked and mended, worn and old
A coloured willow-pattern bowl.

See the two birds flying high,
And the little bridge across the stream,
And the trees, and the maiden's house hard by—
How fresh and fairy-like life does seem !

Such is her dream of happiness,
As nearing death she makes her soul
All her philosophy in this—
A coloured willow-pattern bowl.

EVENING STROLL

OUT of the earth I tread on, once came I,
And I can stir and walk and even run
And blast away a mountain if I try ;
This pigmy flesh more potent than the sun.

Warm comes my blood from countless sires of yore
And women's hearts beat back through age of time,
And I always want to know what went before,
To wake this wonder from a waste of slime.

A single planet pales the deepening glow,
So like myself, all wistful and alone ;
Distant I gaze at him, and yet I know
At Jupiter a man might cast a stone.

If we are all that God has made his care,
Why did he choose to make more worlds than ours ?
A little orange hurtling through the air—
And yet the only one with girls and flowers ?

Look ! where that strip of mist of saffron sheen,
With glittering cloak enfolds the purple trees,
Whose shadows on the amber grass are green,
Whose leaves are rustling on the Zephyr's breeze.

The sunset's gold lights all the summer sky,
Upon the downs my wide green world is hushed,
And God and truth are near to me, as I
Have all my question in the quiet crushed.

LOKODI

YOU that I found so lonely, waiting, dumb,
Waiting for someone whom you knew would
come,
Seeking a soul across a vacant world.

Oh ! our glad meeting—earthly free and bold !
You with your greeting as it were of old,
I, too, so certain we had met before.

Peering more close they know I recognise
That mental glimmer in your warm grey eyes,
In their first flash that all your soul unfurled.

Are you some daughter of a Rameses' bride ?
Daughter of *mine* ? Back ! Back my fancy rides
To some sweet love that we have known of yore.

And, as you seek my blessing at my feet,
Dear ! some new truth my soul goes forth to greet,
And all my former gods are headlong hurled !

IN THE NIGHT WATCHES

WHO is there, on a summer's night,
Who does not feel and realise
The great Creator's awful might
Lit in the solemn sapphire skies ?

By day we know a single star
Alone and splendid in the sky,
But twenty thousand, bright and far,
When he is gone, roll slowly by.

So this great planet of our birth,
Where all the threads of life are spun,
For all its leagues and leagues of girth
Is but the satellite of one.

While we who walk upon its face
With regal tread and threatening eye,
For all our breeding, strength, and grace
Are not one hundred inches high.

They find the bones of other men
Deep in the river's age-old silt ;
Full twenty thousand years since then
That their forgotten blood was spilt.

Thus æons drop beyond our ken,
And we our stirring lifetimes pass,
For all our threescore years and ten
Just grains of sand in the hour-glass.

Ah, God ! who knowest our every thought,
To whom each secret sin is gall,
Thou for the soul this body wrought—
Is that so young ? Is that so small ?

For what is time ? And what is size ?
Our thoughts can soar beyond the stars,
And though this day from the void we rise,
Eternal life shall yet be ours.

OLD SOUL

COME ! tear to shreds my little silver dream,
And set them floating on the winds of woe ;
Anon they'll fall upon the rushing stream,
Down which Romance for me must ever flow.

Yet memory still shall hold a vision fair
In rose and gold those hours that we knew,
Grey and the glory of your limp brown hair,
Your woman's eyes of such a baby hue.

Ambition's hand that holds my head so high,
The star of Destiny upon my brow,
A clear soul shining in a raven's eye,
To charm a fresh young heart, what are they now ?

“*Adonis* ! bah ! a prig, a silly boy,
Who sips the wine and dare not drink the rum ;
Who with my soul's young kisses seeks to toy,
While reason guides his heart and leaves him
dumb ! ”

Phantasmagoria of my great past
Float fast and faintly through my tired eyes ;
This incarnation shall excel the last
Of sacred dust that in the desert lies.

If love divine shall ever cross my way,
She must be my white priestess of the sand,
Meeting as though these ages were a day,
Once more to tread life's journey hand in hand.

ON THE BEACH

SMILE silver wave and smite the shingle shore
Roll on the rounded stones
Salt-smelling shingle stones
Rush back to sea again with roar and louder roar
Here comes your brother wave
Sister wave
Mother wave
Rush back to sea again roar upon roar
Child of the oceanside
Emerald and welling tide
Smile silver wave and smite the shingle shore

ROSE AND GOLD

NOW all alone
Her beauty fills my eye,
In her dear smile
A lifetime's joy I live ;
As with each quivering breath
She seems to give
To her young pride
Her soft surrendering sigh.

Though man must live on Earth,
Unasking and forlorn ;
Though even Death's dark moment
Fate alone decides ;
Yet is he free
Himself to choose his bride—
Sweet flower in whom
Once more his blood shall dawn.

I kiss her hands and feet,
Her eyes, her hair
In auburn tresses shimmering to her waist ;
Robed all so prettily
And silken chaste,
So soft exactly warm,
So most alluring fair.

Sweetheart of all my soul !
Love that ages cannot tire !
Now watch the lightning flash,
Gaze on Paradise in this
Long-held and trembling glad
Overwhelming wonder kiss—
Thunderous twain ecstasy,
Rapt weld in frantic fire !

God of us all, thy blessing !
On our eternal tryst,
Thy will to-night
Since all the world began ;
Now from these balanced brains
Create some master-minded man,
As of her soul and mine
May there be born a Christ !

THE STUDIO

SMOOTH floor of sable sheen.
One orange light.
I have finished reading to them
On the blue cushions
All the faith of night
And tears that might have been.

Come, poet ! play !
Lift lovely limbs to dance
Like light on Beauty's hair
And hold her body close
And glide away
To the soft splash of chords and wine.
This be our drowning hour !
A short small world, but mine.



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